

Dear Dr. Movassaghi:

During the public meetings of the Mississippi River Commission held in Vicksburg, Mississippi, and Baton Rouge, Louisiana, on March 6 and 7, 2002, respectively, Mr. Edmond Preau presented the following items regarding areas of concern to your office.

a. Discussed progress on the Sicily Island and Aloha-Rigolette projects.

b. Discussed the importance of a continued level of funding for the main line Mississippi River Levees project that does not fall below the capability of the Corps of Engineers.

c. Requested support for a higher level of funding for the entire Civil Works program in the Vicksburg and New Orleans Districts.

d. Discussed the importance of the hurricane protection projects in Louisiana.

e. Urged support for funding for the Atchafalaya Basin protection levees project.

f. Expressed concern regarding funding of the Coast 2050 wetlands restoration program.

Construction is currently underway on Levee Items 1C and 1D of the Sicily Island Levee project. In addition, the Vicksburg District awarded the construction contract for the Billys and Falcon Bayou plugs on August 10, 2001. This is the last construction contract, and based on current construction schedules, the Sicily Island area project should be completed in September 2002, barring unforeseen delays.

As you know, Congress added \$200,000 in the Energy and Water Development Appropriations Act of Fiscal Year 2002 for the Aloha-Rigolette project. By law, these added funds are not subject to cost sharing and will be used in completing construction of the project. A letter report is being prepared to address this authorized change to the project cost-sharing requirements and to serve as the basis for amending the Project Cooperation Agreement. The clearing and snagging of Bayou Darrow, the last construction item, is scheduled to be awarded in July 2002.

The Mississippi River and Tributaries (MR&T) project is 87 percent complete. However, levee work still remains to be done in the Memphis, New Orleans, and Vicksburg Districts. While the majority of the levee raising is in the Vicksburg District, substantial progress is being made. In Louisiana, approximately 114 miles of levee remain to be raised. Maximum deficiencies have been reduced from the 7- to 8-foot range to the 4- to 5-foot range with the most deficient areas being raised first. Also, approximately 24 miles of levee in Arkansas needs to be raised about 2 feet. We anticipate that the levee raise in Arkansas will not commence until some of the more deficient sections in Louisiana and Mississippi are complete. The Vicksburg District is committed to raising these levee sections as quickly as possible in order to protect the State of Louisiana.

As you are aware, the completion date of 2031 for the MR&T project was based on anticipated Congressional funding; however, the Corps of Engineers and the levee boards have indicated the capability to complete the levee enlargement program by 2020.

In the last several years, the levee program has been funded to its capability. The Congress recognizes that the Corps must complete the levee enlargement as quickly as possible.

The Commission shares your concerns about the Fiscal Year 2003 budget amounts in the Mississippi River and Tributaries project. We also appreciate your continued testimony before the House and Senate Appropriation Subcommittees regarding the need

for funds. If you are successful in your efforts to have funds added by Congress in Fiscal Year 2003, the Corps stands ready to accomplish this much needed work. However, as you know, funding is ultimately based on national funding priorities. The Administration views commercial navigation as a core mission because of the widespread benefits it provides to the nation. The Fiscal Year 2003 budget gives priority to those ports and harbors that are used for commercial activities or subsistence fishing. Most of the larger ports and harbors provide a more significant economic return to the nation compared to smaller

harbors. Likewise, among inland waterways, the budget gives precedence to waterway segments that have high commercial cargo volumes or low costs per ton-mile of commercial cargo.

The New Orleans District plans to complete the comprehensive Hurricane Protection, Louisiana, reconnaissance study report by July 2002. The initial focus has been on the east bank of Jefferson Parish in order to utilize currently available information and thereby reduce the study time and cost. The District will be working closely with the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development in the development of a plan to provide protection from Morgan City to the Mississippi state line.

In regard to your concern for Atchafalaya Basin protection levees, the Corps continues to pursue levee construction as a high-priority item in the overall MR&T funding appropriations. Major levee deficiencies exist in the area west of Berwick. Significant construction progress has been made in this area, and four additional contracts have been awarded since September 2001. Where sufficient borrow material is not available, uncapped sheetpile floodwalls will be constructed to achieve the desired design grade. If the Corps of Engineers receives additional funds to award additional contracts next fiscal year, the work will be advertised at the earliest possible date.

The Corps will continue to work closely with the State of Louisiana in developing the comprehensive plan for the Coast 2050 project. As part of the overall plan, a financing strategy will also be developed to adequately fund this critical project.

Thank you again for the presentations at our Vicksburg and Baton Rouge meetings. The Commission appreciates receiving the views of the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development and looks forward to hearing from you or your representatives at our future public meetings.

Sincerely,

Edwin J. Arnold, Jr.
Brigadier General, U.S. Army
President, Mississippi River
Commission